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(71) Applicant

Maygay Machines Limited

(Incorporated in the United Kingdom)

Primrose Avenue, Fordhouses, Wolverhampton,
WV10 8AW, West Midlands, United Kingdom

(72) Inventors

Alan Claypole

Lee Gregory

(74) Agent and/or Address for Service

Mawburn Ellis

2 Curator Street, London, EC4A 1BQ, United Kingdom

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(58) Field of search

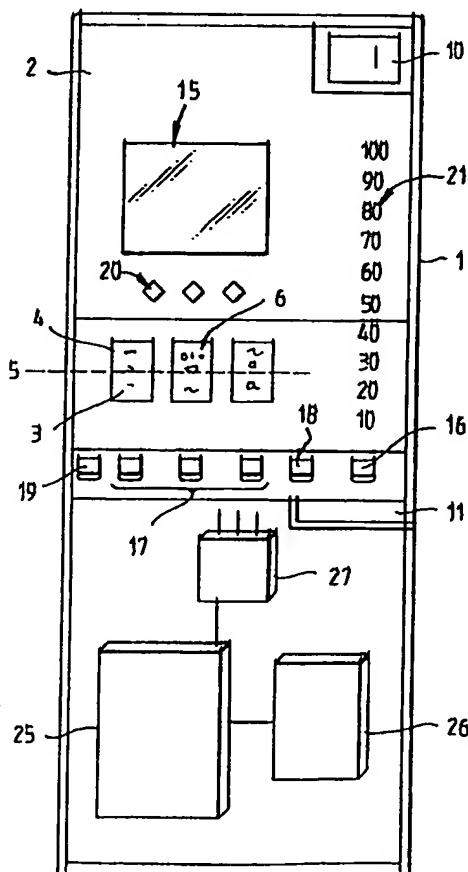
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(54) Game machine

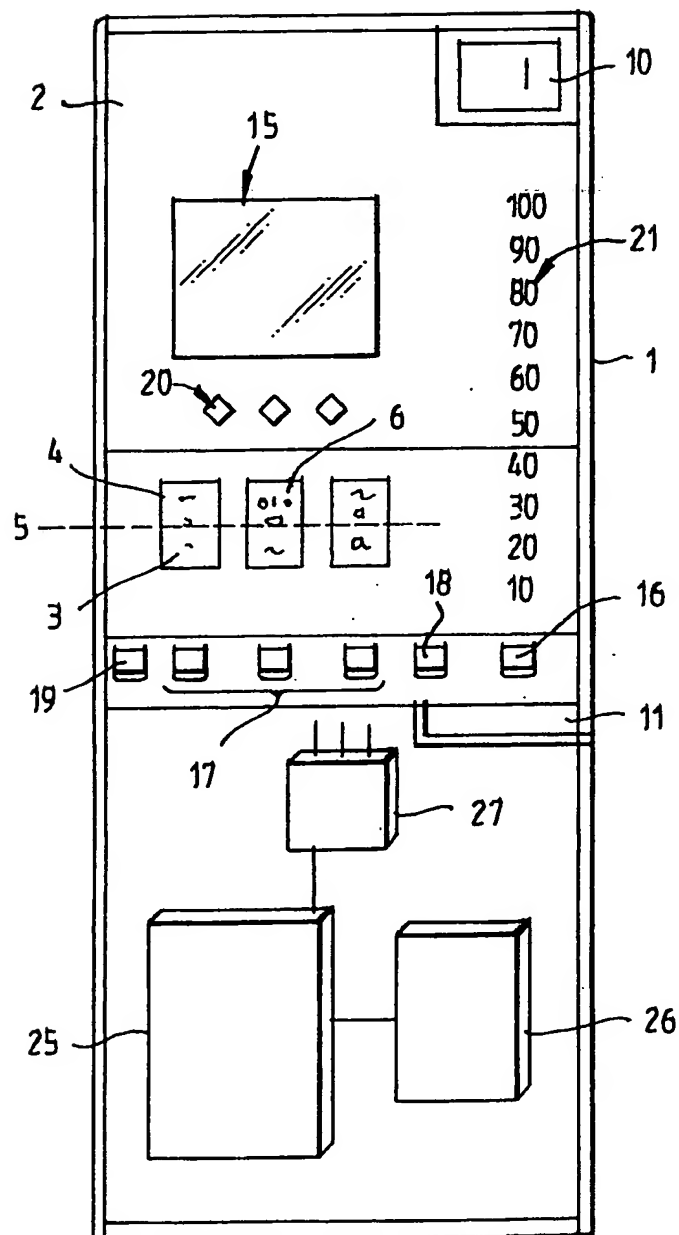
(57) A game machine of the fruit-machine type has a reels display (3), typically comprising three rotatable reels with fruit symbols, and a video display screen (15) with associated video game controls (20). Elements of a trail system (21) are progressively illuminable by certain outcomes of a game played on the reels. Sufficient advancement of the illuminable trail elements (21) initiates the display of a video game on the screen (15), typically involving an initial choice element followed by a second element which is an interactive game of chance or skill.

Fig.1



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Fig.1



GAME MACHINES

----- This invention relates to game machines, in
particular fruit machines.

5 Fruit machines are well known. A conventional fruit machine is a gaming or amusement machine having a reel display which consists either of plural rotatable reels with peripheral series of symbols on them, or representations of such reels.

10 The machine generally has means for receiving credits e.g. by insertion of cash, or in the form of tokens or cards. These credits are converted, as soon as they are inserted or more usually by the action of a start button, to play a game on the reel display. In the
15 game the reels rotate and then stop in a random or quasi-random fashion. If the reel display has simulated reels, the symbols shown on these are changed correspondingly in a random or quasi-random fashion, and it is normal to simulate to some extent the spinning of actual reels.
20 After the reel display is run, the combination of symbols appearing along one or more "win lines" determines whether or not some award, such as a prize, pay-out or game advantage, has been won.

 While each conversion of a credit will result in a
25 game on the reel display, it is also conventional to offer at least one and usually several "features". These are further game elements which occur intermittently over

the playing of a number of games on the reel display.

The features have involved enhancement of the basic fruit machine game. For example, when a winning combination of symbols appears on the win line, a

5 "gamble" feature gives the player an opportunity to gamble the basic pay-out, either increasing it or losing it. Another very common feature is the "hold" whereby in some games a player is allowed to keep one or more of the symbols unvaried. In a "nudge" feature, a player is
10 given an opportunity to move reels controllably in a stepwise fashion in an attempt to reach a winning combination. In a "trail" feature, a series of display elements is shown along which the player has a certain chance of progressing as playing of games continues. If
15 the player progresses to the end of the trail, there may be a further prize, feature or jackpot to be won.

GB-A-2192478 describes a fruit machine in which a video display screen or other electronic display replaces the normal machine facade using electric bulbs. The
20 further display can be used to indicate availability of features such as nudges, trails and gambles which previously were indicated using electric bulbs behind a printed glass screen.

GB-A-2117155 describes a separate screen showing a
25 representation of symbols on the reels, to assist the player in using a nudge feature.

GB-A-2072395 describes a video screen addition to a

fruit machine, permitting the playing of video games for certain selected dispositions of the reels.

~~In the present invention, we are concerned with~~
providing a new kind of gaming or amusement machine. The
5 machine is generally speaking a fruit machine, that is it has a reel display which plays a game for each credit converted as described above. The machine has a further display which is an electronic display screen such as a cathode ray tube. This screen is used to provide various
10 novel features as discussed below.

In one particular aspect, the machine comprises means providing a skill game feature which is played using the further display screen and which constitutes a "feature" with respect to the fruit machine game. The
15 skill game, or various skill games, may be provided as awards depending on the performance of the fruit machine game of the reel display. In particular, opportunity to play a feature on the screen may be achieved by means of a "trail" system or the like, dependent on the fruit
20 machine game. Additionally or alternatively, opportunities to play the skill game may be presented in a random or quasi-random manner over the playing of a number of games of the fruit machine reel display.

In one preferred embodiment, a skill game offered
25 for playing on the screen is a quiz game. For example, when the quiz game feature is offered, the screen can present a question and a multiple choice of answers from

which the player selects, an award or the offering of a further feature being available if the player selects the correct answer using selection means provided on the machine.

5 Another possible skill game is of the "video game" type involving e.g. dexterity and/or timing, for which the electronic screen display is peculiarly well adapted. Moving images on the screen may represent, for example, a shooting game in which the player uses an actuator on the machine to shoot at a target or targets presented on the further display screen. Again, an award or the offer of a further feature can be made dependent on the player's success in the shooting game.

15 The further display screen which we use in the present invention can have any one or more of a number of possible functions. Some of these are now mentioned, as other aspects of the invention.

20 Firstly, chance-governed features of the fruit machine game can be provided on the screen. These might include, for example, the display of gamble or "nudge" features.

 We propose some chance-governed game features for display on the screen which are in themselves new, or whose use in such a machine is new.

25 In one feature, an array of identifiable fields is presented on screen, one or more of which can be individually selected by the player e.g. by a

controllable cursor caused to appear on the screen, and a symbol corresponding to each selected field displayed or "uncovered". According to the identity of the uncovered symbol, an award is or is not made, and/or the amount of an award is adjusted.

Preferably the symbol associated with a respective field is varied between one playing of the feature and the next, to make it less predictable.

In another feature, a playing card face selected at random or sequentially is displayed on the screen. A player can then enter a prediction as to the relative value of another card face. The machine store then displays a subsequent card face on the screen; this is compared with the player's prediction and an award (which may be the offer of a further feature) made dependent on the player's accuracy.

The feature may offer a plurality of opportunities for guessing the relative value of subsequent cards in one game, provided that each previous guess is correct.

Means may be provided whereby no subsequently displayed card face is a duplicate of one previously displayed in any one game. This helps the player to guess.

In another new feature, after the fruit machine game has been played but within the conversion of that respective credit, the machine itself generates automatically one or more selected extra outcomes for the

reel display, selected from a restricted field of outcomes corresponding to awards or at least an increased chance of an award compared to the normal fruit machine game. The outcome(s) may be shown on the reel display itself and/or on the further screen display.

5 In another new feature, the machine has a special status mode which it may enter either randomly, quasi-randomly and/or in response to certain selected outcomes of the fruit machine game. In this special status, the machine is receptive to a sequence input by the player using the machine controls, determining an award on the basis of the input sequence. When the machine enters the special status, an indicator appears on the display screen. This is a so-called "secret" feature, in which usually the display screen gives no instructions to the player as to how to obtain an award. The award may be determined by a coded sequence arising from the order of pressing of e.g. a set of buttons.

10 In a further aspect, the feature presented on the further display screen may comprise the reproduction on the screen of a recording of actual filmed events, or an animated image. Again, a cathode ray tube-type screen is particularly well adapted to offer a feature of this entirely novel type. The reproduction of the recorded actual event might be comprised in a skill feature or in a chance feature. The feature may therefore involve so-called "virtual reality" whereby the player either

interacts, or is given the impression of interacting,
with the events taking place on the screen.

In another particular aspect, in a fruit machine as
defined and having a further display screen as mentioned,
5 a stored chance game feature is displayed on the further
display screen intermittently over a number of fruit
machine games. Further games are stored in the machine
store. For a certain restricted field of outcomes of the
chance game feature, one of the further stored games is
10 made available for display on the further display screen.
This game may be sent to the screen automatically for
display when the specified outcome of the chance game is
confirmed. More preferably, selection means are provided
whereby the player may choose between (1) displaying the
15 further stored game on the screen and (2) returning to
the fruit machine game or continuing on the screen with
the existing chance game feature.

The further stored game element may itself be a
chance game, or a skill game such as a quiz or
20 dexterity/timing test.

In another aspect, the further display screen may be
used to give information about the game. This might be
general advice as to the operation of the machine.
Additionally or alternatively, the display information
25 could be "game hints" occurring transiently as a game
proceeds and making suggestions to the player relevant to
the actual state of the fruit machine game. For example,

the machine might flash up a hint to "hold" a particular symbol.

In another aspect, means can be provided to display on the further display screen the value of the awards (winnings or credits) accumulated by a player, either automatically or upon request being entered by the player to display the value.

A further new proposal for the machine is making the further display screen touch-responsive. The technology for making display screens touch-responsive is generally known, but has not previously been applied to a screen presenting features of a fruit machine game. For example, a touch-responsive screen could be used for selecting the player's answer to a quiz question or the like, in a manner which is much more intuitively natural than the use of conventional button actuators which are distant from the screen and designed primarily for other purposes such as operating the fruit machine game.

In a further aspect, the further display screen displays a chance game feature of a novel type, namely a "mystery win" in which the size/existence of a win is determined by an arrangement of elements e.g. playing card faces, which is predetermined by the machine for each play of the game. Thus the player takes little or no part in determining whether or not he has won, but the elements are concealed on the screen until the player "uncovers" the relevant portion e.g. the face of a

playing card, using a prescribed actuation, to see whether or not he/she has won on that feature.

5 ~~In another aspect, the screen can be used to~~
display, from time to time, the value of a progressive
jackpot which may be accumulating.

10 A further aspect of use of the screen is related to
a "trail" feature, as mentioned above. It has previously
been suggested to provide a trail feature on screen (see
GB-A-2192478). We also propose however to provide a
trail feature on the fascia of the machine and which,
when a predetermined level thereon is reached, initiates
the offering of a feature on the video display screen.
The trail feature on the fascia preferably is patterned
so that it actually leads towards the physical position
15 of the further display screen on the machine.

20 In a still further aspect, means may be provided in
the machine for displaying on the screen status
information indicating the operational condition of the
machine. This information can be used for maintenance
and service testing.

25 The above description identifies features of the
machine functionally. It will be understood, however,
that the design of hardware and software to perform such
functions is generally within the skill of the skilled
person in this field and does not need to be explicitly
described. Means for performing the identified function
are therefore described implicitly.

A specific embodiment of the present concepts is now described in some detail, with reference to the accompanying drawing which is a view of the front of a fruit machine.

5 As seen in the figure, a gaming and amusement machine of the fruit-machine type comprises an upright cabinet 1 with a display at the front. The display includes a glass fascia panel 2 with printed art work and illumination behind in a known manner. Three rotatable
10 reels 3 are mounted in the machine in a generally conventional manner, behind respective display windows 4 defining a win line 5 along which symbols 6 on the reels are aligned. A coin acceptor slot 10 for receiving credits is provided at the top of the fascia, and a tray
15 11 for issuing payouts - in the form of coins or tokens - is provided at the front of the cabinet underneath the inclined part of the cabinet where the reels are displayed.

 Above the reels, the fascia is interrupted by the
20 rectangular screen 15 of a cathode ray tube.

 On the front console below the reel display, the machine has a start button 16 for initiating rolling of the reels, a respective operating button 17 for each of the reels which can be used either to move that reel
25 stepwise when a nudge feature has been made available, or to hold the position of that reel when a hold feature is available, a collect button 18 for collecting winnings,

and a "cancel" button 19 for cancelling an instruction given to the machine.

~~A set of three further buttons 20 is provided on the~~
fascia just below the display screen 15. The functions
5 of these are explained below.

Artwork on the fascia includes a "trail" consisting of a series 21 of progressively illuminable numbers from 10 to 100. The trail series is positioned above the start button 16, leading upwardly in the general
10 direction of the display screen 15. Other conventional artwork may be included. In particular, there will usually be a table indicating the various winning combinations of reel symbols and the amounts of the corresponding awards.

15 In operation, the player inserts sufficient coins into the slot to get one or more credits. Conversion of a credit by pressing the start button sets the fruit machine reels rolling in the conventional quasi-random manner. According to the resulting arrangement of
20 symbols along the win line, an award may or may not be won. If no award is won and no features are offered, the player must convert another credit and set the reels rolling again.

A minority of the fruit symbols on the reels are
25 accompanied by numbers. These are used to operate the trail feature. For each play of the fruits, the numbers appearing along the win line are totaled and the trail

series illuminates up to the total value. Normally the total is lost after each play, but in some cases a "hold" feature enables the total to be held and added to in the subsequent play.

5 For any winning combination of symbols, the player may simply collect the amount won using the collect button. If however the trail value reaches a predetermined minimum e.g. at least 70, or the symbols combination of the win line is one of a selected few
10 high-value combinations, the machine determines this and initiates a feature routine displayed on the display screen 15.

In this embodiment, the screened feature enables the player to "gamble" the amount won. An increased award is
15 identified on the screen. The screen also shows the face of a playing card and the player is invited to guess whether a subsequent card of the same suit will be higher or lower in value. The player enters the guess using one of the extra buttons. The second card face is then
20 shown; if the player guessed correctly the gambled amount is achieved. It can be collected if wished. However at this stage the player may also gamble further by guessing for a further card. At the same time a "REVEAL" message is shown in a corner of the screen. If the player
25 prefers to play a feature rather than gamble further, he can press the right-hand extra button causing the machine to send to the screen a selected one of a number of

stored video games. One example is a multiple-choice quiz game, of the "trivia" type in which a question is put on the screen together with three possible answers. The player selects the answer using one of the three
5 extra buttons. For a correct guess, the player is accredited with an award.

Another possible feature which can be exposed by the "REVEAL" window is a shooting game. A series of moving targets e.g. flying ducks, is depicted moving across the
10 top of the screen, as it were in the distance. A gun barrel is depicted at the bottom of the screen and the player uses the start button to time the launch of projectiles from the gun barrel at the flying targets. After all the targets have flown across, the number of
15 hits made is displayed and the award to the player adjusted accordingly.

Another possible feature is a "scratch card". An array of patches is shown on the screen, together with a cursor which can be moved using two of the extra buttons.
20 The patches "conceal" fruit machine-style symbols. The player chooses which of a specified small number of patches he elects to uncover. If the symbols uncovered are a winning combination, the winning amount is credited to the player.

25 Because the game is shown on an electronic screen and stored in video game format, the arrangement of uncoverable symbols can be different for each of a number

of showings. This makes it impossible for even an experienced player to predict which patches should be uncovered in order to win.

A further feature obtainable by this route we call "win series". When the "reveal" option is taken, the machine automatically actuates its own rotatable reels to reach a combination which is guaranteed to be a winning combination. The combination and the amount won are immediately shown on the display screen. The machine then has a 50% probability of repeating the automatic win rolling of the reels as described, or of stopping the operation of that feature so that the player must play again. In this way a player may on this feature obtain several runs on the reels, each a winning run.

A number of other possible games may be used as the "reveal" feature. One possibility is a game using edited video material of actual events, discussed further below.

After features have been played on the screen, the screen displays the total amount which the player has in credit.

When the feature has been played out, the player can collect his winnings, and go on to play another credit by rolling the fruit machine reels.

A novel characteristic of this embodiment is a self-regulating selection of the features. The different features available to the player by the "reveal" function are larger than the number of opportunities he has to

obtain such features. In the embodiment described, each successive gamble on the card game gives the player the option of a different "revealed" game. With experience, the player comes to know how many gambles he needs for his preferred revealed feature game. We construct the machine to monitor the number of times a given revealed feature is taken up. On the basis of the monitored distribution, the machine may withdraw the least popular options from availability and substitute different games. This ensures that a change of popularity of various games with time can be followed automatically by the machine, without any need for research and adjustment by service personnel.

Within the machine's cabinet are located a master control unit 25 and a slave control unit 26, a picture storage unit 27 and a video display. These are shown schematically.

The MCU displays pictures taken from the PSU onto the video display as well as controlling the reels via the SCU. It is possible to integrate the tasks performed by the SCU onto the MCU to achieve one control unit.

It should be understood that the hardware and software used for the master control, which effectively incorporates the reels game control, video display control, trail control, and video game initiating control, may in themselves be of conventional types which the skilled man can design on the basis of the proposals

herein. The actual divisions of the control functions within the master control is of course a matter of programming, and is not sensibly shown by illustration.

This machine also includes a "secret" feature. The machine is programmed to be put into "secret feature" mode whenever any one of a very few specific combination of symbols appears on the reel display. These combinations, and the existence of the "secret feature" mode, are however not indicated on the machine panel at all. When the mode is entered, however, some non-explanatory indicating sign, e.g. a light, appears on the display screen 15. An experienced player will notice this and realise that something special is happening. In this mode, the machine will respond to an ordered pressing of the hold/nudge buttons 17 by making a bonus award. The amount of the award depends on the order in which the buttons are pressed. Again, even an experienced player may take many games to understand the action required to gain a bonus payout following the indication on the display screen 15.

Such features are attractive to the experienced player.

The above description relates to the actual playing on the machine. When the machine is not being played, the control processor can revert to a more passive mode. This may nevertheless serve to attract players to the machine e.g. by displaying excerpts from the feature

games available, or other messages, on the CRT display screen of the machine.

~~A feature offered on the display screen may involve~~
the use of edited video material.

5 In a first stage, original film footage is taken of relevant events. For example, film can be taken of an actual roulette table on location, until all thirty-seven possible outcomes have occurred and been recorded. The film recorded on ordinary video tape is then edited and
10 processed into separate clips, each showing a different number coming up. Once processed, the edited footage is converted from analogue tape format into digital picture format and stored e.g. on a laser disc using a laser video disc recording system.

15 The amusement machine is provided with a suitable player e.g. a laser disc player which is loaded with the digitised recorded information. When the machine is played, the main processor of the amusement machine will selectively identify and extract one of the outcomes.
20 This might be according to a pre-determined sequence to give a particular payout percentage. The information for the desired outcome would be extracted from the player, using a graphics processor, and converted into the format which can be projected onto the conventional analogue
25 monitor screen.

 The above techniques are suitable for reproducing a simple game requiring only short episodes of reproduced

action. To obtain higher storage rates, the digitised picture information can be down-loaded to a computer and compressed using data compression software. This is a known technique, and can yield a compression rate of the order of 40:1. Means for de-compressing the information are then fitted into the amusement machine's own on-board processor. After decompression, the data can then be sent as before to the graphic processor and thence to the screen.

CLAIMS:1. A game machine comprising

means for receiving credits;

5 a reels game system comprising a reels display having plural reels showing reel symbols, and means for converting a received credit to play a reels game by initiating a change in the disposition of the reels leading to a reels game result dependent on the changed
10 disposition of the reels;

a video game system comprising a video display screen, a video game store, and video display means for displaying a video game from the video game store on the video display screen;

15 a trail system, comprising a series of sequentially activatable elements, which can be progressively activated, cumulatively along the series, in dependence on the reels game result, and

video game initiating means to detect when the trail
20 is activated to a predetermined degree along the series, and respond to that detection by initiating the display of a said video game on the screen.

2. A game machine according to claim 1, comprising a
25 video game control for use by a player to interact in the video game.

3. A game machine according to claim 2 in which the video game system comprises means for

~~displaying said video game as first and second game~~
elements which are different from one another, the first
5 game element comprising a display of a player choice, to
be input using the video game control, and
selecting the second game element in dependence on
the input choice.

10 4. A game machine according to claim 3 in which the
player choice displayed by the first game element
comprises a choice between chance-determined adjustment
of an award value, and display of the second game
element.

15 5. A game machine according to claim 3 or claim 4 in
which the second game element is a player-interactive
skill game element.

20 6. A game machine according to claim 3 or claim 4 in
which the second game element is a player-interactive
chance game element.

25 7. A game machine according to any one of claims 3 to 6
in which the video game store stores a plurality of said
second game elements.

8. A game machine according to any one of the preceding claims in which the video display screen is positioned above the reels display.
- 5 9. A game machine according to any one of the preceding claims in which the elements of the trail system comprise respectively illuminable display segments.
- 10 10. A game machine according to any one of the preceding claims in which the trail system comprises means for cancelling any activated element of the trail in at least 50% of conversions of received credits.